



U.S. Immigration
and Customs
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News Release

VISA FRAUD CONSPIRATOR SENTENCED TO 10 YEARS IN PRISON

Scheme allowed scores of unknown people to illegally enter dozens of countries

CEDAR RAPIDS, Iowa — Charles W. Larson, U.S. Attorney for the Northern District of Iowa, and Michael Vail, resident agent-in-charge of the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) office in Cedar Rapids, announced today's sentencing of the second of two conspirators convicted of participating in a worldwide visa fraud organization.



Fraudulent passports

Abdulaziz Bah, 38, of Guinea, was sentenced to 120 months in prison by U.S. District Court Judge Linda Reade. The sentence imposed was almost double the 63-month sentencing guideline maximum.

Bah was convicted by a jury Feb. 10 in District Court for the Northern District of Iowa on two counts of possessing fraudulent documents and one count of conspiracy to defraud the U.S. government. The conspiracy count included: wire fraud, mail fraud and manufacturing and transferring various fraudulent documents. Bah is also required to forfeit \$325,000, which represents the proceeds of his unlawful activity.

In sentencing Bah, U.S. District Court Judge Linda Reade said, "This scheme placed the citizens of the United States, as well as the citizens of the European Union, at risk."

Today's sentencing is the result of an investigation launched by local ICE agents into an international visa fraud organization that allowed scores of unknown people to illegally enter as many as 23 countries worldwide using fraudulently obtained visitor's visas.

“Our job is to restore integrity to this nation’s legal immigration system,” said Michael Vail, resident agent-in-charge of the ICE Cedar Rapids office. “In this case, we’ve also helped other countries strengthen the integrity of their immigration systems.” Vail said that several foreign governments that cooperated with ICE’s investigation have since tightened their requirements for obtaining visas.

“This was a complex international scheme to defeat the border security of multiple nations. This fraud was exposed by the creativity and persistence of the ICE and Postal Inspection Service,” said U.S. Attorney Charles W. Larson Sr. “This elaborate fraud stretched from the far reaches of West Africa to the Central Plains of America. Border security does not end at the border.”

Another co-conspirator in the visa fraud conspiracy, Unis Bah (his relation to Abdulaziz Bah is unknown), was sentenced March 18 in U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Iowa to 30 months in prison without parole and fined \$5,000 for making false statements to ICE agents.

After serving their sentences, both men will be placed in removal proceedings, which may result in deportation back to their home countries. Congress has mandated through the nation’s immigration laws that criminal aliens be processed for removal.

The scheme in which both men were participants involved creating identities for imposters so that they appeared to be permanent residents, or “green card” holders, of the United States. The U.S. documents produced for the scheme were primarily permanent resident cards and Social Security cards. The conspirators also obtained high-quality counterfeit passports from African countries such as Guinea, Sierra Leone and Senegal.

The conspirators then filled out visa applications and mailed them, along with the fraudulent identity documents, to foreign consular offices located within the United States. The consular offices, believing the applicants were approved U.S. legal immigrants, issued visas and mailed them to U.S. addresses, including addresses in Cedar Rapids. In addition to Iowa, these visas were also mailed to: California, Connecticut, Maryland, Minnesota, Mississippi, Missouri, New York, Texas, and Washington D.C.

The conspirators then moved the visas and related false identity documents overseas, where unknown persons assumed the identities and traveled to the target countries for entry. The false identity documents seized by ICE investigators showed that the imposters were primarily males from various African countries between 16 and 45 years old.

“We don’t know who these people were, and we don’t know what their intentions were,” said Vail. “These are methods that criminals and terrorists employ.” Vail said that his investigators determined that some imposters, once they entered the target country, didn’t follow the planned itineraries as a requirement of the visa application process. “Once they entered these countries, they simply vanished. The ICE investigation plugged a significant hole in international security.”

ICE investigators estimate that over the past several years, hundreds of these imposters used the fraudulently obtained visas to illegally enter countries worldwide. The countries most frequently targeted for illegal entry were: Ireland, Belgium, France, Great Britain and the Netherlands, but as many as 18 additional countries have been identified as having been targeted.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Richard Murphy, Northern District of Iowa, prosecuted the case.

ICE special agents from Cedar Rapids and ICE intelligence analysts from Chicago conducted this investigation, with assistance from the U.S. Postal Inspection Service, the Cedar Rapids Police Department and the FBI.

ICE

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement was established in March 2003 as the largest investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security. ICE is comprised of four integrated divisions that form a 21st century law enforcement agency with broad responsibilities for a number of key homeland security priorities.